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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SANTIAGO 000411

STATE FOR WHA/BSC, WHA/EPSC AND OES/IHB  
STATE FOR MED

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SUBJECT: CHILE'S HEALTH MINISTRY -- NO CASES OF SWINE FLU; REQUESTS  
NEW DETECTION KITS

REFS: (A) Santiago 402; (B) State 41768

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Vice Minister of Health Jeanette Vega confirmed to Emboffs there are no cases of swine flu in Chile. During the meeting, USDA Attache encouraged Chile not to restrict U.S. pork imports; Health Ministry officials responded they have no intention to limit entry of such products into the country. Vega also outlined Chile's procedures to protect its borders: screening at Santiago's international airport, issuing questionnaires for air and cruise passengers, distributing pamphlets on swine flu at land border crossings and warning against non-essential travel to the U.S. and Mexico. Vega requested information on the distribution of new viral detection kits being developed by CDC. End summary.

Chile Does Not Intend to Restrict U.S. Pork Imports  
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12. (SBU) On April 28, USDA Attache Joseph Lopez, ESTHoff, and the Embassy Nurse met with Vice Minister of Health, Dr. Jeanette Vega, to discuss Chile's reaction to the swine flu scare. Vega was accompanied by Chief of the Division of Public Policy and Health Promotion Helia Molina, Chief of the Office of International Cooperation and Affairs Jose Miguel Huerga, and legal counsel Elly Loyola. Lopez praised Vega for Chile's organized approach to screening at the airport, which has not caused significant inconveniences to passengers (ref A). He also encouraged Chile to continue to allow in U.S. pork, noting there is no evidence to support transmission of swine flu from eating pork.

13. (SBU) Molina said Chile understands that swine flu is not transmitted by consuming such products but rather from person-to-person contact. She then highlighted Chile's close monitoring of the CDC website and implementation of its recommendations.

GOC Will Use Anti-Virals To Contain Any Confirmed Cases  
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14. (SBU) When the Embassy Nurse asked about the prophylactic use of anti-viral medication, Molina explained that the GOC only intends to treat people who develop swine flu and that it does not intend or recommend using anti-viral prophylactically. She indicated only about two percent of the population is considered at-risk to develop a severe case of some type of influenza, and Chile is prepared to treat those people. Vega clarified that if Chile has a confirmed

case of swine flu, it would treat those people in close contact with the infected person, providing them with anti-viral medication to contain the disease. According to Vega, the GOC will publically denounce any pharmacy that attempts to price gouge citizens seeking to purchase anti-viral medication for their own use.

#### Protecting Chile's Borders With Information

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15. (SBU) When asked about the screening of people entering Chile for swine flu symptoms, Vega stated that they are only doing extensive screening of U.S. and Mexican arrivals, utilizing thermal fever screeners at the airport. With respect to passengers on cruise ships stopping in Chile and flights to Chile from countries other than the U.S. and Mexico, she noted the GOC is requesting information about travel and general health by using questionnaires. As for land border crossings, Vega said the GOC is distributing information (pamphlets) about swine flu and indicated that it mirrors some of the information Chile has up on its [www.pandemia.cl](http://www.pandemia.cl) site. [Note: Among other public health information and links, this site includes the details of Chile's national emergency action plan for avian influenza. End note.]

16. (SBU) Vega acknowledged that Mexico, not the United States, is Chile's primary concern. Officials noted the GOC is recommending against non-essential travel to both the United States and Mexico.

#### Chile Requests Updated Viral Detection Kits

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17. (SBU) At the end of the meeting, Vega requested information on  
SANTIAGO 00000411 002 OF 002

the distribution of the new viral detection kits that CDC is developing for the current strain of swine flu. She said Chile does not need them yet, but would like to be prepared and wants to know when and how they will be distributed to interested countries.

Comment: Chile Taking Appropriate Steps, But Public Upset

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18. (SBU) From its public statements and the meeting with Vice Minister Vega it is clear that the Ministry of Health has taken a proactive approach and discouraged public panic. Despite these efforts, however, many members of the public remain concerned, evidenced by crowded clinic waiting rooms with people overly concerned about cold/flu symptoms and price gouging for anti-viral medication. Regarding the Ministry's request about the viral detection kits, the Embassy Nurse will follow up with CDC and provide an appropriate response.  
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